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Shah's Admission to U.S. Is Linked To Misinformation on His Sickness

Jimmy Carter's decision to admit the Shah of Iran to the United States, the decision that ignited the 444-day hostage crisis, was based in significant ways on misinformation and misinterpretation of the nature and urgency of the Shah's medical problems.

The New York Times has learned, in an extensive examination of the Iranian crisis, of important discrepancies between what the former President remembers being told about Mohammed Riza Pahlevi's condition and the facts as recalled by the private physician who was the Administration's sole source of information about the Shah's health.

In fact, it was not medically necessary to treat the Shah in the United States. The Shah's physician acknowledged that at the time, and former officials of the Carter Administration have conceded it since.

A Calculated Political Gamble

Mr. Carter has not said whether he would have declined to admit the Shah if he had had all the medical facts, but it is now evident, the inquiry shows, that his decision was not the spontaneous, humanitarian act it was described as at the time. It was a calculated political gamble taken after months of argument among Administration officials, and it was influenced by an intensive lobbying campaign on behalf of the Shah by an "old boy network" that included some of the nation's most influential citizens, including Henry A. Kissinger, David Rockefeller and John J. McCloy.

This new perception of that key decision is one of a series emerging from a three-month inquiry into the admission of the Shah into the United States and its 14-month aftermath. A 19,000-word report on that inquiry will appear Sunday in a special issue of The New York Times Magazine entitled "America in Captivity: Points of Decision in the Hostage Crisis." Copies are being distributed to some wholesale newsdealers today.

To shed fresh light on the crisis, Times reporters conducted interviews in half a dozen countries with scores of leading figures involved in the events. Mr. Carter, in the first substantive interview he has given on the Iranian crisis, described the rationale and motivation behind his decisions in a conversation at his home in Plains, Ga. The inquiry also turned up hundreds of pages of previously unpublished documents and private correspondence among the decision-makers.

Disclosures in the Times report include these:

¶The Iranian students who captured and held the American hostages in the United States Embassy in Teheran for 444 days had originally planned a far more modest act: a three- to five-day takeover along the lines of a campus sit-in of the 1960's. Instead, the students were quickly caught up in the frenzy of Iranian popular support for their action and became, in a real way, hostage to the hostage crisis themselves. This perception of the Embassy seizure emerged from an interview with one of the Islamic zealots who planned and executed the takeover.

¶The Shah discovered his cancer himself when he felt a lump in his abdomen on a skiing trip in Switzerland in 1974. French doctors identified it as lymphoma, or cancer of the lymph gland, and the Shah chose to treat it as a state secret. He successfully concealed his condition from American intelligence agencies for six years, even to the point of misleading American doctors who visited him in Iran. If the United States had known in 1974 that the Shah had only a few years to live, American officials say today, it would have begun to reconsider his policy toward his regime, and the sensitive question of a successor, long before the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini decided the matter by revolution.

¶Within the first two weeks of the crisis, the Pentagon developed detailed plans for military action against Iran, including a naval blockade, mining of its harbors, seizure of the huge oil depot on Kharg Island and an air strike against the vast refineries at Abadan. The closest Mr. Carter came to ordering such action, he said in the interview, was on Nov. 20, 1979, 14 days after the seizure, when the Ayatollah was publicly threatening to put the hostages on trial for espionage.

¶Planning for a second attempt to rescue the hostages began the day after the first failed in flames on April 25, 1980. It progressed to the point of rehearsals in the Utah desert, and, in one incident that apparently was related to the second effort, a United States Army helicopter crashed, killing one serviceman and wounding six others. No second attempt was undertaken because diplomatic negotiations had taken a promising turn by the time it was ready.

¶The Carter Administration made secret commitments to the Shah in December 1979 to encourage him to leave the United States for Panama after his operation. Among them was the promise that he could return to this country for medical treatment if necessary. But when the Shah seemed close to invoking that pledge three months later, Mr. Carter made it clear that the price of readmission for the Shah would be abdication of the Peacock Throne.

¶Despite official denials at the time, Hamilton Jordan, the White House chief of staff, and Sadegh Ghotbzadeh, then the Iranian Foreign Minister, met secretly in Paris in February 1980. Mr. Ghotbzadeh pleaded with Mr. Jordan not to disclose the meeting publicly lest it cost him his life. The meeting was a landmark in the crisis: the first high-level contact between American and Iranian officials since the hostages were taken three months earlier. It accounted in part for the Administration's high hopes of resolving the crisis in the spring of 1980, 10 months before the hostages were finally released.

Negotiations With Wrong Leaders

¶The Reagan Administration had decided to freeze the negotiations in place had an agreement not been reached with Iran by noon, Jan. 20, 1981, when the new President took office. The Carter Administration communicated this to Iran through the Algerian mediators, and,

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